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ABSTRACT

Designed to be used before and after attending a centennial performance of the music of African American composer William Grant Still, this cue sheet presents information about the performance. The cue sheet presents biographical information about Still and background information on the Lincoln Theatre in Washington, D.C., which had been closed from 1982 to 1995. The cue sheet discusses the musical program ("Danzas de Panama" and two art songs) performed by the Kinara String Quartet. The cue sheet also briefly discusses the "DC Showbiz Kids," who perform the dances. (RS)

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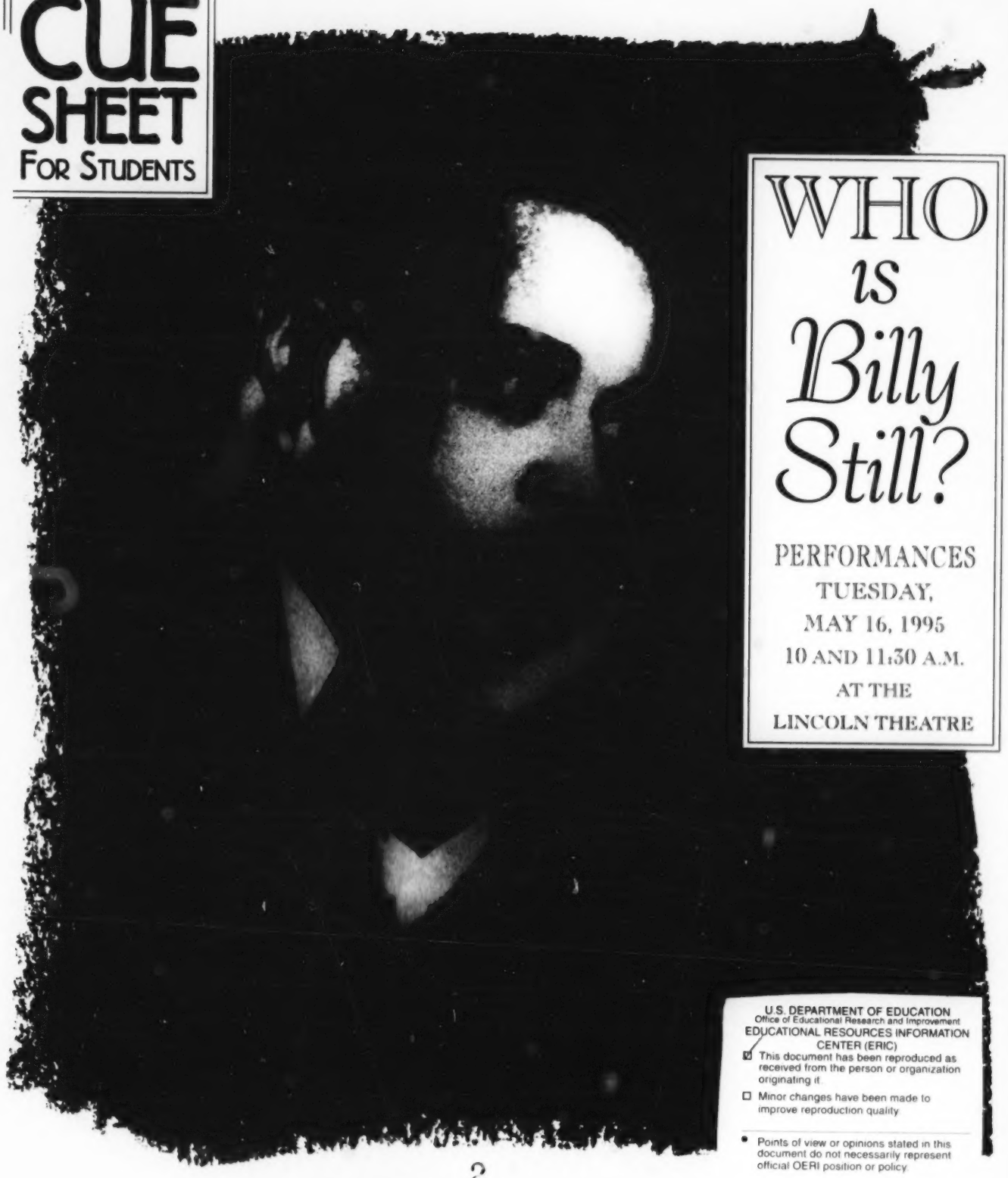
CUE SHEET FOR STUDENTS



WHO *is* *Billy Still?*

PERFORMANCES
TUESDAY,
MAY 16, 1995
10 AND 11:30 A.M.
AT THE
LINCOLN THEATRE

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CS 508 910

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The Kennedy Center

- Who was the first African-American composer to write a full-length symphony and have it played by a major orchestra?
- Who was the first African-American to conduct a major symphony orchestra?
- Who was the first African-American to conduct a major all-white orchestra in the Deep South?
- Who played oboe in the orchestra for "Shuffle Along," one of the first all-black Broadway shows?
- Who was the first African-American composer to have an opera produced by a major opera company?
- Who was the first African-American composer to have an opera televised over a national network?
- Who wrote the "Afro-American Symphony," which has been performed by orchestras all over the world?
- What composer wrote background music for such diverse television shows as *Perry Mason*, *Gunsmoke*, and *The Three Stooges*?
- What composer wrote more than 150 compositions, including operas, ballets, symphonic works, chamber music, instrumental, choral, solo vocal works, and also arranged Negro spirituals?
- What composer received honorary degrees from nine colleges and universities?
- Who fought quietly for racial harmony in the United States, using his dignity, his integrity, and the "all-American" nature of his music?

The answer to all these questions is William Grant Still, who was born in Woodville, Mississippi, on May 11, 1895, and would have been 100 years old this month.

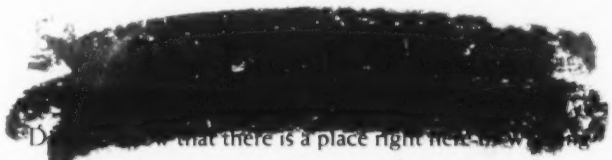
When he was an infant, William Grant Still and his mother moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, after the death of his father. Young Billy's stepfather, Charles Shepperson, was a music lover who took him to concerts and owned a collection of opera records that Billy listened to for hours on end. His mother wanted him to become a doctor, but the pull toward music was too strong. He first attended Wilberforce University, where he was supposed to be studying science; however, he wrote,

"I spent all of my allowances for music instead of buying my textbooks. One time I used my entire allowance on a used oboe... I taught myself.... The band had a student bandmaster before I got there, and after I got settled I took over the band...I made arrangements for the band. I would borrow instruments from the band's supply and teach myself the basics until I learned what kinds of things each instrument could do."

Eventually he played the violin, the cello, and the oboe professionally. He attended Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio, which is famous for its excellent music program.

William Grant Still was known as "The Dean of African-American Composers." He wrote primarily classical music. He said his music reflected all the African, Scottish, Choctaw, Spanish, and Irish influences that were the legacy of his ancestors. Mr. Still was totally committed to the brotherhood of all Americans.

When asked "What is the ultimate meaning of music?" William Grant Still replied, "To state it in the simplest terms, for me, music is beauty." Mr. Still died in 1978.



Did you know that there is a place right here in Washington where famous jazz musicians used to come to play—entertainers like Duke Ellington, Pearl Bailey, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Nat King Cole, Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong, Billy Eckstein, Sarah Vaughan, and Freddie Washington? That place is the Lincoln Theatre in the Shaw neighborhood of Northwest Washington.

In 1921, the year the Lincoln Theatre opened, the latest and most exciting technology was movies with sound (talking pictures). Television had not yet been invented. For an evening's entertainment, many people went to see a show that included a movie and live performers all in one

night. For African-American audiences in Washington, the place for a first-run movie and live show was the Lincoln Theatre, located at 12th and U streets. At that time, U Street was sometimes called "Black Broadway."

Since theaters were segregated until the 1950s, African-Americans built or operated their own theaters and moviehouses, including the Lincoln, the Howard, the Dunbar, and the Booker T. From the turn of the century until the 1960s, the area around the Lincoln Theatre attracted the best and most popular African-American entertainers.

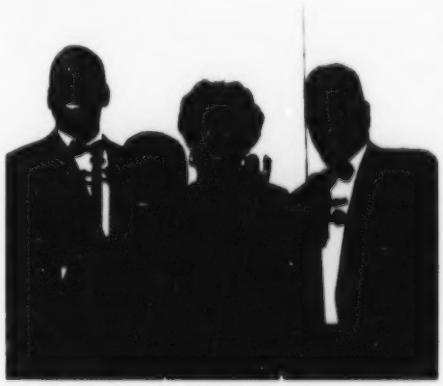
During the riots in the late 1960s, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., much of the Shaw neighborhood was destroyed. Many businesses closed, and the area that was once a center of cultural life was reduced to ruin and decay. The Lincoln Theatre closed in 1982.

Late in the 1980s, plans were made to rejuvenate the Lincoln, and after many financial trials and a tremendous amount of work, the Lincoln reopened this year, restored to its past glory and eagerly awaiting audiences from all parts of the city.

"Danzas de Panama"

Played by the Kinara Quartet: Phyllis Fleming, violin; Margo Guillory, violin; Kelly Burgess, viola; Jimmie Dye, cello

Can a violin sound like a violin, but also like a drum? That is what William Grant Still wants the performers to do in his composition "Danzas de Panama" (Dances of Panama).



Some of the players in the Kinara String Quartet are supposed to tap rhythms on their instruments to imitate the sounds of native drums. They also must play the strings with a bow in the usual way, and pluck the strings with their fingers. All these playing techniques enable them to simulate the sounds of Caribbean dances.

Some of the native dances you might see in the Caribbean came from Africa with the first slaves many years ago; others descend from the Spanish and Native Indian cultures of the Caribbean.

String quartets customarily play what is known as "chamber music"— music written to be played in a regular-sized room or "chamber" rather than in a large concert hall.

"Danzas de Panama" is written in four sections or "movements," all of which are based on real dance music from Panama, a Spanish-speaking Central American country that lies between Costa Rica and Colombia. Each movement has a title, and each title refers to a specific native dance:

a. A "Tamborito" is a dance usually performed with percussion instruments and voices, so the string quartet must imitate that sound. Listen for the drums!

b. "Mejorana" is a dance that is improvised by guitars and a three-stringed violin. Mr. Still's version tries to imitate that sound, but with a traditional string quartet and no actual improvisation.

c. A "Punto" is a graceful dance in six-eight time, notable for its use of Zapateo (shoetapping) and a Paseo (Promenade).

d. A "Cumbia" is a sensual dance of the Caribbean. When it is danced in the streets, the women hold lighted candles in their upraised hands while the men dance wildly around them. Sometimes a Cumbia is danced in a more refined way.

Mr. Still wrote original music in each of the four styles of these lively and colorful dances.

CONTINUED ON BACK

Two Art Songs by William Grant Still

"Grief"

Text by LeRoy V. Brant, sung by Leonard Lee, baritone

"Winter's Approach"

Poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar, sung by Iyona Garner, soprano

"Art songs" are written by a composer who, using a solo voice with piano accompaniment, tries to interpret the deepest meaning of a poem or text.

In the song "Grief," the words describe an angel with pinions (wings) trailing down, mourning the death of a loved one. The angel is comforted by the appearance of a white dove, the promise of salvation after death. Mr. Still uses lush chords to accompany a melody that returns again and again to the same note. This dramatic effect makes the listener feel that the singer is almost in a trance, grieving for the lost loved one.

"Winter's Approach" is jazzy and fun, portraying a country couple and their dog getting ready for a cold winter by going hunting. The country dialect used by Paul Laurence Dunbar in his poem helps the listener picture the people and the rustic setting of the short story.

Mr. Still felt that his talent and skills were a gift from God, so at the end of each piece of music he wrote, "With humble thanks to God, the source of inspiration. W. G. Still"

The performers, Leonard Lee and Iyona Garner, are in the 11th grade at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

The DC Showbiz Kids

The DC Showbiz Kids really want to be in showbiz! They are a select group of 20 students from the Creative Dance Center in Northeast Washington, where they study ballet, jazz, and modern dance.

Some of the Showbiz Kids already have show business agents and have appeared in movies and commercials. They also work hard in school: many of them are honor roll students at Banneker and other D.C. public schools. They range in age from 12 to 19, and perform all around the city. This year they have appeared at fashion shows, in a Christmas presentation, and as part of Black History month celebrations. Their mission is to provide the best entertainment possible as a service to the community.

The Kennedy Center and National Symphony Orchestra are proud to be partners in The William Grant Still Centennial Celebration with

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